

LINGUISTIC DIFFERENCES ACCORDING TO FAMILY BACKGROUND AND ECONOMIC STATUS VARIABLES

Dorjana Klosi, MA, PhD Candidate

The University of “Ismail Qemali”, Albania

Abstract

The linguistic diversity and heterogeneity coexist with social diversity. There is no case in which the social and ethno-cultural community is linguistically homogeneous, as there is no known situation where social and ethno-cultural communities are socially homogeneous. Currently available studies show that there are five factors affecting linguistic behavior of individuals of a social community. They are: age, gender, ethnic group, socioeconomic class and family background.

However, given that the study in question is realized at the University of “Ismail Qemali”, the objects of the study is focused on two linguistic variables: family background and economic status.

Keywords: Family background, economic status, linguistic variables

Introduction

The language spoken in family is a crucial factor for the linguistic culture of the child. The family is the smallest linguistic and social community nucleus and its status it is reflected through its members. Family environment it is a crucial factor due to its importance regarding various aspects of human life, in particular language acquisition and linguistic competence. The lack of such close linguistic human contact would result in speech disorders²³.

In the history of the Albanian linguistics, after 1990 this phenomenon was brought up in different levels of discussions. Since 1990, the use of dialects at school and the revaluation of the standard norm as a “matter of culture” has been an inevitable subject of discussions and this issue continues to be a major concern at our universities.

²³ Simkins Bullock, J and Wildman, B 'An Investigation into the Relationships between Gender and Language' Sex Roles 1991 f. 361.

The linguistic “chaos” is observed by students as well. A vast number of students admit that more should be done to prevent the usage of non standard forms in auditoriums. Some individuals, despite their academic performance, reflect dialectical linguistic patters in their linguistic performances.

I:

1. What is family discourse?

Family discourse includes all words, expressions used, created and generally understood only by members of one family²⁴. Basing on the usage and creation of words and expressions, a part of the lexicon (neologisms) created by the family, are not found or explained in any conventional dictionaries.

Foreign studies have shown that many families have “their own language”, which is formed and understood by the family members only. For the outsiders, not belonging to the close social group, such as the family, this special vocabulary is hardly intelligible.

Meanwhile, Albanian linguistic studies are rare in this domain. 53 % of Albanian students at the University of “Ismael Qemali admitted the usage of such language in their families. These coinages are used and understood by members of the family and close relatives only. However, such words and phrases are not regarded as neologisms, because the lexical creations within family are very few. Family language, mostly, consist of words, phrases or proverbs that are well known to others. The difference in this context is the shades of meaning or the usages that this lexicon takes.

The difference between American families, quoted by Paul Dickson in Family words, and the Albanian families’ language are the words. Many American families use neologisms to have a secret communication which is understood only by family members. Such lexicon may be used in generations and meanwhile it is enriched, changed, modified to suit cultural, economic, technologic changes, etc.

But, in Albanian family discourse the neologisms are rare. Communication is realized through existing words and expressions. The frequency of use of a certain vocabulary within the family is its fundamental feature. Although, there are few cases where the language of family is created by adding to existing expressions new meanings. So, the language used in the family gains the feature of secrecy.

The survey conducted with students of the University of Vlora, consist in two stages: 200 students were surveyed in the auditorium about the

²⁴ Nordquist R., *What is Family Slang?* Grammar and composition.
www.grammar.about.com/od/grammarfaq/QAFamilySlang.htm

usage of the literary language and secondly, the completion of the questionnaire. The study concludes that:

In family discussion is mostly spoken in dialect due to their origin and geographical region.

Although they prefer to speak in dialect, students are against the usage of dialects in auditoriums.

Usually most students prefer to preserve traditional culture values by speaking in their dialect.

There are many cases where students use phrases of their family language in informal situations and social contexts, such as with close friends. Such are:

Table 3. 4 Examples of family language, from different cities.

	Typical family language
Vlorë	<i>...a të heqtë...; ik lipsu...; kombisht; kur të vinë mend, s'ti hanë as qëntë; sporë;</i>
Durrës	<i>Shëndet, jetë dhe harmoni i kërkoj Zotit!, Kështu u mbleshim përhera!, "Mizerje!"</i>
Shkodër	<i>Ka hup si Xhaferri simiten. Si asht vendi bahet kuvendi.</i>
Fier	<i>Kush kërkon ç'i teket, në fund merr ç'i mbetet; cirku; pasta; albitër, ai boti</i>
Korçë	<i>Shtri këmbët sa ke jorganin; se vë ujin në zjarr;</i>
Ballsh	<i>Me plakun tallu se do të bëhesh vet, por me të sëmurin jo se e ka kusur nga Zoti; bir Selmani i nënës; ...gur për kokën tënde do ti kesh;</i>
Lushnja	<i>qepe gojën se ta dhashë një suratit; ëmbëlsirat e mia, tërë lezet;</i>

Case study

The survey held with 150 students of bachelor studies was conducted in two phases: observation of students communication in auditorium and the completion of the questionnaire. The study concluded that:

- ✚ Due to the influence of dialect in informal communication among family members and relatives, students use dialect in most of the family conversations.
- ✚ Because of the great influence of dialect in everyday speech, students prefer to preserve cultural and linguistic tradition of their family.
- ✚ In most cases of informal speech to each-other, students prefer to speak in local language variation; they claim their strong will to avoid using dialect patterns in auditorium.
- ✚ 39 % of students consider the usage of standard forms outside auditorium, as an essential element in realization of direct communication. Thus, intercultural misunderstanding is avoided in most of the cases, and standard language is considered as an important social tool to present oneself to the others.

Basing on sociolinguistic studies, the linguistic relationship between parents and children weakens by the time of adolescence. Meanwhile, peer influences gain new position in this regard. The context of discourse along with other linguistic elements, is crucial in determining which linguistic register to use in various situations.²⁵

Thus, individual usages of language are influenced firstly by family and then by close social groups. The major sociolinguistic difference in this concern is how language of individuals reflects family background and social class. Differences are noticed mainly in the tone of voice, lexicon, and grammatical patterns²⁶.

Despite the growing influence of peer group communication, family plays an important role in teaching a child the basis of a language and linguistic styles. Education level of parents or other family members, affects the discourse of other members. The higher the education level of parents, the more elaborate is the discourse²⁷. Parents who have a certain education try to talk to children at home in the standard language.

Variation in language appear more in the field of phonology, vocabulary, i.e. word choice, and grammatical patterns. The real problems are reckless usage of language, mistakes, the improper use of foreign words, the use of the infinitive etc. (Ymeri 2002:54)

Basil Bernstein stated that linguistic differences are observed in social settings and the status of a particular social group, such as the family, it is distinguished by the linguistic forms it uses²⁸. The differences are more obvious if there are major differences between the socio- economic levels of families. So, we distinguish two major social classes: the middle class and lower working class. Linguistic differences between the two classes derive from the different linguistic patterns used by each of the classes.

Bernstein also suggests that the discursive forms of middle class are dominant over those of lower class; the latter uses a narrow linguistic code of limited linguistic choices.

Albanolog Gj. Shkurtaj states: *linguistic competence and behavior of people should be related to social position they have in Albanian social hierarchy*. Also, Shkurtaj claims that: *as a rule, the higher the level of*

²⁵ Shkurtaj, Gj. *Sociolinguistika*. TOENA, Tiranë 2005f 158.

²⁶ Piluri, A., Dardha, D., *Ndikimii mjedisit social në gjuhën e fëmijëve*. Studime Sociolinguistike. Universiteti “Fan S. Noli”, Korçë, 2013, f.140.

²⁷ Shkurtaj, Gj. *Sociolinguistika*. TOENA, Tiranë 2005f 159.

²⁸ Bernstein, B., *Language and Social Class*. The British Journal of Sociology, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Sep., 1960), pp. 271-276 Wiley: The London School of Economics and Political Science, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/586750> . 26/01/2014 15:59

*education, the more obvious will be the difference between individual's linguistic behavior and their social strata*²⁹.

Observations made for this purpose, help us to come to certain conclusions:

Students from middle-class families or intellectual parents have a richer vocabulary, use selected vocabulary, use structures and grammatical features appropriately, use well-structured expressions etc.

Students, who come from working class families, use language in a careless way. Their linguistic performance displays a limited vocabulary, simple words and phrases, unstructured sentences etc.

It is believed that these linguistic features create a linguistic inferiority³⁰. But during the process of analysis of linguistic data, it was obvious that: many of the surveyed students, who come from working class families or uneducated parents, try to improve their speech to the situation. Therefore, they make serious efforts to express themselves in standard language and their speech did not give any clue about their social class or family background.

To illustrate it, let's see some examples of spoken discourse that students use in their families:

Student 1. *Posi nuk të beson njeri që janë plumb mësimet! Kam dy provime në një ditë. Po do mundohem të dal sa më mirë, po se di. Avazet filluan. S'di ça të mësoj më parë, nuk është e drejtë. Ku do ikim këtë verë? Po mendoja të filloja ndonjë punë po nuk ja dal dot? Relaks. Kam dalë pak keq në këtë provim, po do e rregulloj.*

Student 2. *O familja, e dini që kam provimet, pak respekt, se pastaj thoni pse ngele...mos ngej. Unë i bëra të gjitha, por ajo nuk ma dha. Lashë vetëm dy pyetje. Më në fund, shyqyr se vdiqëm motra. Ç'a do bëjmë se u plakëm në shtëpi? E pi kafën kur do. I merr dot të gjitha provimet? U plakëm këtu.*

Student 3. *I bëra të gjitha ushtrimet. I mora të gjitha. Ika unë, të djelën vi. Ngrihet rob kur i do qejfi. Ku do vemi për pushime sivjet? I bëjnë bomb fare, të ngatëruara. Nuk kam për t'ju zhgënjyer. Mezi po pres të vij në prapë pushimet, se jam lodhur me ngarkesën mësimore. E mora! E ndrita!*

Student 4. *Kam provim, kam mësuar ca. Ishalla dal mirë. Janë ca të vështira. Kur do shkojmë andej? (for vacation) E bëra provimen, pres përgjigjen. Mirë dola. Çfarë planesh ke? Nuk dola mirë po hajt s'ka gjë.*

As noted, the examples are not classified according to social strata, because the phrases and vocabulary used reflect linguistic features of

²⁹ Shkurtaj, GJ., *Sociolinguistika*. Botimet Toena, Tiranë, 2005. F. 158/9.

³⁰ Piluri, A., Dardha, D., *Ndikimii mjedisit social në gjuhën e fëmijëve*. Studime Sociolinguistike. Universiteti "Fan S. Noli", Korçë, 2013, f.141.

standard language, conversational discourse and slang. Such are: *plumb mësimet, ajo nuk ma dha, shyqyr se vdiqëm motra, u plakëm në shtëpi, rob*. Other features are: incomplete and unfinished grammatical structure, most of the information is implicit within the social and linguistic context they are used etc...

Conclusion

Such linguistic elements reflect the position of socio-economic class, and family background of these individuals. Often happens that the family environment affects the speech of its members. Schoolar A. Piluri states that there are obvious differences of language communication skills of people belonging to different social classes³¹.

Likewise, there are cases of students from intellectual families of middle /high social class, who use a language code that is not appropriate of their family background.

In fact, by examining the linguistic behavior of students belonging to different intellectual and social strata, we can better define the social and behavioral aspects of the individual's personality.

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³¹ Piluri, A., Dardha, D., *Ndikimii mjedisit social në gjuhën e fëmijëve*. Studime Sociolinguistike. Universiteti "Fan S. Noli", Korçë, 2013, f.140.